

This week's community profile: Valmy

From the ashes, over and over

By Karil Van Boxel

Press-Gazette

VALMY — The desire to survive characterizes the history of this Door County community.

Four fires destroyed homes and businesses over the years but residents cleaned up and rebuilt portions of Valmy each time.

"The same places are here just in different shape," said David Leist, 40, who bought a former realty and a custom home-building business at 4915 Valmy Road from his father, Robert, in 1990. "It hasn't changed much over the years."

Emil Leist, Robert's father, started E.P. Leist & Son in 1950. The lumber mill,

which once occupied the site of David Leist's office,

was destroyed in May 1968, the last major fire to take its toll. That blaze cracked windows at Emil Leist's home next door and at Robert's home across the street.

Robert and his brother, Charles "Win" Leist, built a grocery store in 1947-48 in the community, which is on Wisconsin 57 and Door County T about 50 miles northeast of Green Bay. Their brother, Alvin, built the V-Bar. Both are still in existence.

Jim Kerscher, 56, expanded Kerscher's Foodland grocery on Wisconsin 57 after he purchased it in 1958. Known for its homemade sausage, including venison and summer, Kerscher also cuts beef and pork for area farmers.

Kerscher's creations, a baby doll cradle and other wooden items, hang from store beams.

The biggest fire started in the hardware store on the south side of Door County T on May 3, 1928. Before the inferno ran its course, it engulfed the blacksmith shop, several homes and a barn, Wallace "Bud" Felhofer, 71, recalled.

"I came home from school and the bus didn't get through. I watched our house burn from the top of the hill," said Felhofer, 204 Memorial Drive, Sturgeon Bay.

The Felhofer family also recovered from a 1922 fire at the garage Bud's father, Edward, and his uncle, Frank, built in 1918. They rebuilt the garage in 1923 and Felhofer Brothers offered Model-T Fords and Dodges for sale. Chevrolets were added in 1923, Cadillacs in 1939 and then Oldsmobiles.

"You'd be surprised how many Illinois people come in here to say they always bought their new car at Felhofer Brothers," David Leist said.

Today, the car dealership's two buildings are owned by former employees. Jim Abrahamson bought half for Jim's Auto Body 21 years ago. Don "Pete" Peterson owns Pete's Valmy Motors in the other.

Abrahamson's wife, Helen, 60, helps run a clean, neat auto body shop. "We have to keep it that way because we work here every day of the year," she said.

Both like the community. "It's a very nice area, a very safe area. It's a pleasure to live here," Abrahamson said.

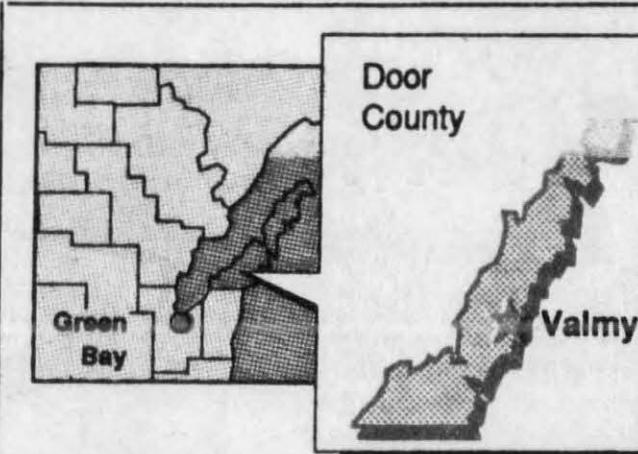
Peterson, 56, who sells tires, auto parts, gas and goods, said he enjoys his 80 acres of land for hunting deer and the proximity of his cottage at Clark's Lake.

Press-Gazette photos
by Ken Behrend



Wood work: Robert Leist, a long-time Valmy resident, stacks an armload of wood as his son,

David, watches. Robert and his father, Emil, owned a lumber mill in Valmy.



The Valmy file

- Population:** 80
- Name game:** Valmy was Voseville first, named for a farm family that had the post office in its house. Valmy may have come from the battle of Valmy in France. But it also may have been an alternative to Valley, residents say.
- Valmy vitals:** The community is 9 miles from Sturgeon Bay and about 4 miles from Clark's Lake and Whitefish Bay. It's had sanitary sewer since 1974.

Son Jeff, 30, who works with him, also has no desire to leave.

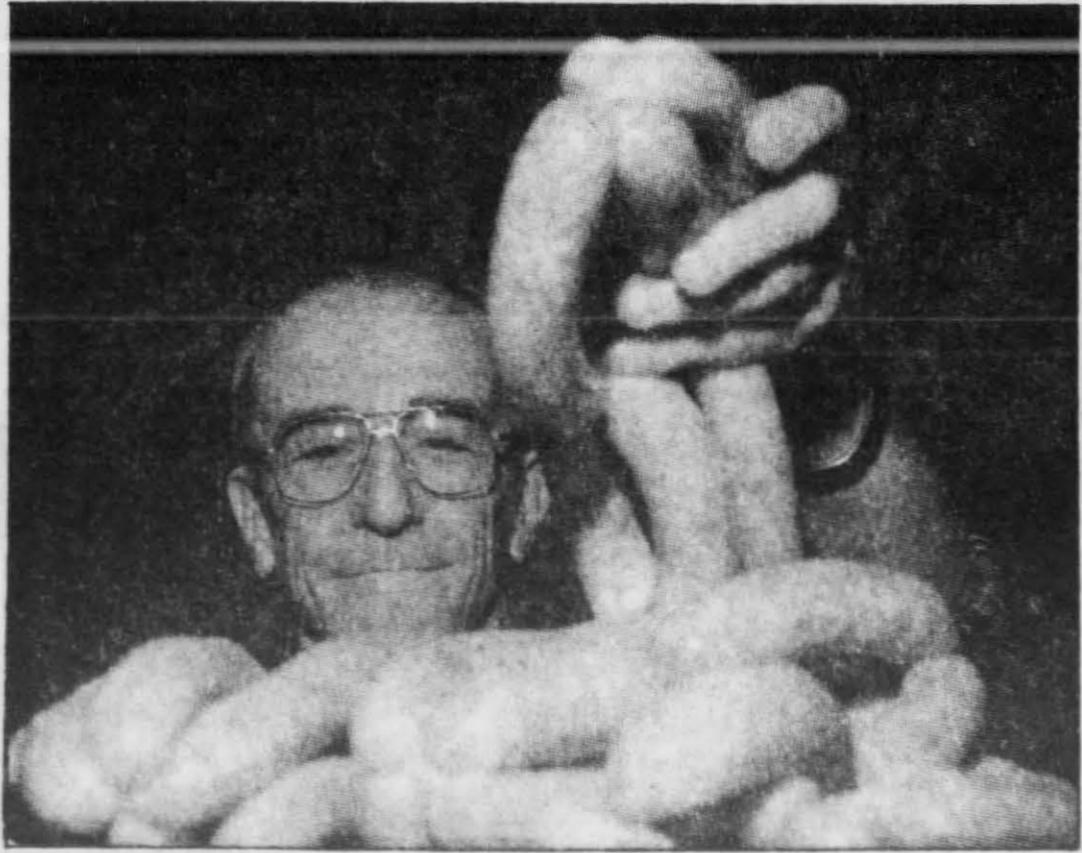
"Everybody kills himself trying to get up here. I might as well stay," he said.

Eric Henkel, 20, and Kirk Volkman, 23, bought the Valmy Happy Hour, 4418 Door County T, two years ago. The bar and restaurant features chicken and dumplings on weekends when moms Jean Henkel and Carol Volkman cook.

Volkmann's grandfather, Harvey Junction, owned a tavern that burned on May 23, 1966, at the site. Henkel's father, Larry, was bartending that night.

The community owes its longevity to tourism, Robert Leist said. "That is the nucleus that has held us together."

■ Next week: Champion in Brown County



Sausage stack: Jim Kerscher, owner of Kerscher's Foodland grocery store, weighs homemade brats on a scale.



Bumped: Jim Abrahamson replaces a bumper at the auto shop he runs with his wife, Helen.